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François Recanati

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From Meaning to Content : Issues in Meta-Semantics

François Recanati

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I. How Many Levels ?

Semantics is in the business of systematically assigning meaningful contents to sentences and other complex expressions, on the basis of a prior assignment of content to the constituent expressions. The contents assigned to natural language sentences are supposed to account for their role in communication.

In the theory of communication, however, another notion of content comes into play : the psychological notion of the content of an attitude such as belief. Speakers attempt to communicate the content of their beliefs by saying what they say, and they say what they say by uttering sentences with certain meanings. This raises a central meta-semantic issue : what exactly is the relation between the notion of content used in belief-desire psychology (including the theory of communication) and the notion of content or meaning applied to expressions of the language ? What relation is there between the content of the belief which the speaker attempts to communicate and the content of the sentence she utters ?

The meta-semantic question has a simple answer, it seems. By uttering a sentence which means that *p*, the speaker expresses her belief that *p*, and if all goes well she manages to communicate that belief to the hearer. So there is a single entity which is both the content of the belief (expressed by the speaker, and hopefully communicated to the hearer) and the content of the sentence. Cases in which the speaker does not believe what she says, or says one thing to communicate another, introduce complications which we may safely put aside, for they presuppose the normal case from which they depart in regular ways.

The entity which is both the content of a (declarative) sentence and the content of the corresponding belief is a *proposition*. What is important about propositions, however we analyse them, is that they are truth-bearers : they are true or false. Beliefs and sentences are truth-evaluable because they have contents (propositions) which are. That is the gist of what I will refer to as the Simple View :

The Simple View

The meaning of a sentence is a proposition, and doxastic attitudes themselves have propositions as contents. What a sentence expresses is something that can be believed (or disbelieved), and that can be evaluated for truth and falsity just as beliefs are. Communication exploits this feature : by uttering a sentence which means that *p*, one induces in the hearer the belief that *p*.

The Simple View has been maintained for some time as a matter of idealization, but the pervasiveness of context-dependence in natural language soon led to a less simple view, popularized by David Kaplan :

The Two-Level View

There are two levels of meaning for linguistic expressions: character and content. Character is determined by the grammar, and it determines content with respect to context. Content, in turn, determines truth-value with respect to circumstances.

The content of indexicals depends upon the context, and the context-independent meaning (the character) of the indexical is a rule of use that fixes its content with respect to context. ‘I’ refers to the speaker, ‘you’ to the addressee, ‘now’ to the time of utterance, and so on and so forth. Once we have the character/content distinction for indexicals, we can extend it to all expressions. In some cases the distinction matters and in others it doesn’t.

On the Two-Level View, the proposition that is the content of an utterance is the content of the belief expressed (and communicated) by that utterance, but that is not the same thing as the linguistic meaning of the sentence. Linguistic meaning determines content with respect to context, and it is the content of the utterance, not its character, that corresponds to the content of the belief and can be communicated.

There is a complication, however. The content of an utterance, Kaplan says, is a function from circumstances to truth-values. Now circumstances include times as well as worlds, for Kaplan. Kaplanian contents are therefore not propositions in the standard sense, but (in some cases at least) *temporal* propositions à la Prior. A temporal proposition (e.g. the proposition that Socrates is sitting) is not true or false absolutely, but only at a given time. Now there is an ongoing debate over the question, whether or not temporal propositions can be believed and communicated. If they cannot, as many authors hold, then kaplanian content is not the level of content we need to bridge the gap between semantics and belief-desire psychology. If the content of an utterance is a temporal proposition, and such propositions cannot be the content of belief, then we need to distinguish the content of the belief from the content of the utterance, in addition to distinguishing the content of the utterance from its linguistic meaning.

Some philosophers say that temporal propositions *are* the content of temporal belief. Hintikka ascribes to Aristotle and the Stoics the view ‘that one and the same temporally indefinite form of words [e.g. ‘it is raining’, or ‘Socrates is sitting’] expresses one and the same belief or opinion at the different times when it is uttered’ (Hintikka 1973 : 85). On this view, elaborated by Arthur Prior, the content of a temporal thought is a temporal proposition — a property of times which the thinker ascribes to the time of thought. The thought is true *simpliciter* if and only if the temporal proposition is *true at* the time of thought. The (absolute) truth-conditions of such a thought depends upon a feature of the context, namely the time of thought, but instead of contributing to the determination of content what the context determines is the relevant point of evaluation. A similar view has gained currency recently to deal with first person thoughts. According to Lewis’ well-known theory of the *de se*, the content of a first person thought such as ‘I am thirsty’ is not a classical proposition but a property which the subject (or rather : the subject-at-a-time) self-ascribes (Lewis 1979). The subject now features as an aspect of the circumstance of evaluation, alongside the world and the time.

Other philosophers point out that these relativized propositions (temporal propositions or first person propositions) *cannot be* the content of belief (Richard 1981, Stalnaker 1981). Consider the temporal case first. Beliefs may be retained over time. The subject who believes, at *t*, that Socrates is sitting, may retain that belief at a later time *t*’. What he believes at *t*’ if he has *retained* the initial belief is the proposition *that Socrates was sitting then* (at *t*). That is a classical proposition, and it was already believed at *t* when the subject initially thought ‘Socrates is sitting’. Both at *t* and at *t*’, the subject believes of *t* that it bears the simultaneity relation to a sitting-episode whose agent is Socrates. When we retain a temporal belief, therefore, what we keep believing is not the temporal proposition, but the classical proposition

jointly determined by the temporal proposition and the time of evaluation provided by the initial context.

If the subject, instead of retaining the belief, gives it up and changes his mind, there must be a content (a proposition) which is first believed and later disbelieved. In other words, there must be two propositions P_1 and P_2 such that (i) the subject believes P_1 at t , (ii) the subject believes P_2 at t' , and (iii) P_1 and P_2 are contradictory propositions. Now which proposition is believed at t' by the subject who comes to realize he was mistaken when, at an earlier time t , he thought 'Socrates is sitting'? The proposition he believes at t' is the proposition *that Socrates was not sitting at t* . That proposition contradicts the proposition which the subject believed at t : that Socrates was sitting then. The subject now disbelieves that proposition, which he once believed.

Shifting to *de se* belief, we see that the same considerations apply. When I tell you that I am thirsty, the information you get is that *I* am thirsty. If the content communicated was the first person proposition which Lewis takes to be the content of *de se* belief, the trusting hearer would, by accepting that proposition, self-ascribe the property of being thirsty. Many conclude that even in the case of *de se* thoughts, what is communicated by the speaker who expresses such a thought has got to be a proposition in the classical sense. So the true content of an indexical belief, these philosophers conclude, is a classical proposition, as per the standard view which Prior and Lewis mistakenly departed from.

What this debate shows, I believe, is that we actually need *two* levels of content for the attitudes: the internal content (a 'relativized' proposition) and a more objective content (a classical proposition). The internal content is meant to capture the 'state of mind' (as Hintikka puts it) which is common to all those who think 'Socrates is sitting'. As Perry emphasized, that state of mind accounts for behaviour, and we need to make room for it in our theory of the attitudes. But we need also an objective level of content determined in part by the context, in order to capture the (absolute) truth-conditions of the thought, and thereby account for disagreement, communication and change of mind. The internal content, plus the context (which provides the point of evaluation), determines a classical proposition, true iff the relativized proposition is true at the point of evaluation. That proposition is the objective content.

In the case of utterances too we need two levels. Besides the character/content distinction, another distinction is forced upon us by Kaplan's claim that the kaplanian content is a temporal proposition. We need to distinguish that proposition from the full assertoric content carried by the utterance *when evaluated at a given time* (provided by the context). When the subject says 'it is raining' at t , his utterance is true iff it is raining at t . The classical proposition that it is raining at t is the assertoric content, distinct from the kaplanian content (the temporal proposition that it is raining, a proposition true at an arbitrary time t' just in case it is raining at that time).

The full assertoric content of an utterance is a function of both its kaplanian content and the relevant point of evaluation. It is thus doubly context-dependent. As Kaplan points out, the context comes into play twice in semantic evaluation: it fixes the content of indexicals, thereby generating kaplanian content, and it fixes the circumstance with respect to which the content of the sentence is to be evaluated, thereby generating assertoric content. Character, plus context, gives us the kaplanian content; the kaplanian content, plus context, gives us the full assertoric content: the classical proposition whose truth the subject commits herself to. The Two-Level View has now given way to a Three-Level View, which is my rendering of Kaplan's ideas¹:

¹ Kaplan himself does not single out what I call 'assertoric content', but his framework makes room for this notion.

The Three-Level View

Character determines kaplanian content with respect to context ; kaplanian content, in turn, determines assertoric content, again with respect to context. Assertoric contents are propositions in the classical sense : they can be believed across time and communicated.

Several issues arise with respect to the Three-Level View. First, how do the levels of content we need for semantic purposes (kaplanian content and assertoric content) map to the levels of content we need for the theory of thought ? Given the parallelism between the two-factor analyses provided for language and thought, it is tempting to take the kaplanian content of a sentence to be the same thing as the internal content of the thought expressed by that sentence. In both cases, the assertoric content (of the utterance, or of the thought) depends upon selecting the right point of evaluation for the content. But equating kaplanian content (for utterances) and internal content (for thoughts) raises a difficulty in connection with indexical sentences like ‘I am thirsty’. In Kaplan’s framework the indexical ‘I’ contributes its reference to the content. According to Lewis, however, the subject features in the circumstance of evaluation and the content of the thought is only the property being thirsty, which the subject self-ascribes in the process of evaluating the content at the contextually relevant point. If Lewis and Kaplan are both right, the content of the sentence can’t be the same thing as the content of the thought. So we are faced with a decision. We must either give up Kaplan’s theory of indexicals, or give up Lewis’ theory of *de se* thought, or give up the principle that the content of an utterance is the content of the thought it expresses.²

In a paper discussing Kaplan’s framework (Lewis 1980), Lewis raises another issue. Reformulated in terms of the Three-Level View, the issue is this. Kaplanian content is an *intermediate* level of content, between linguistic meaning (character) and full-fledged assertoric content. To get from linguistic meaning to kaplanian content we need to contextually assign values to the indexicals, and to get from kaplanian content to full assertoric content we need to select the right point of evaluation for the kaplanian content. But is there a real need for the intermediate step?

What we do need for semantic purposes is a level of ‘semantic value’ that is *compositional*, that is, such that the semantic value of a complex expression (possibly a sentence) is a function of the semantic values of its immediate constituents and the syntax. Kaplan and Lewis both pointed out that the semantic value of a sentence can’t be its assertoric content (Kaplan 1989a, Lewis 1980).³ If I say ‘it is raining’ at *t*, the assertoric content of my utterance is the proposition that it is raining at *t*. If the assertoric content of a sentence *s* is its compositional semantic value, then if we embed *s* in a more complex sentence *s’*, the semantic value of *s’* will be a function of, inter alia, the assertoric content of *s*. But that is not what we find. If, instead of uttering ‘it is raining’ in isolation at *t*, I were to embed it under a temporal operator (e.g. under ‘in 2050 at this very hour and place it will be the case that’), the resulting sentence would have a content that is *not* a function of the assertoric content of ‘it is raining’ (the proposition that it is raining at *t*). When I say ‘in 2050 at this very hour and place

² Considerations pertaining to communication support the latter option : several authors in the debate over ‘centered communication’ have given up the so-called ‘mind to speech’ principle, according to which the content of the utterance is the content of the thought it expresses. (For a survey, see Recanati forthcoming *b*.)

³ This is similar to Dummett’s distinction between ‘assertoric content’ and ‘ingredient sense’ (see e.g. Dummett 1973 : 446-47 ; 1981 : 572-74; 1993 : 47-50 ; see also Evans 1979 and Forbes 1989). The need to distinguish assertoric content from semantic value has been emphasized in the recent meta-semantic literature (see Ninan 2010, Rabern 2012, and Yalcin 2014) ; this chapter is my contribution to that trend (see the conclusion).

it will be the case that it is raining' the time t drops out of the picture and the temporal proposition that it is raining is evaluated at a time determined by the temporal index-shifter in the embedding sentence. The time of utterance, t , comes into the picture when the act of *asserting* the sentence takes place, but that act does *not* take place when the sentence is embedded. It follows that the content of the embedding sentence is not a function of the (time-specific) assertoric content of the embedded sentence. We need something else than assertoric content to play the role of (compositional) *semantic value* for sentences.

Kaplanian contents are a candidate for that role – they are supposed to be the semantic values of sentences in context and to obey the compositionality constraint. (Indeed, the need to satisfy the compositionality constraint is the main reason adduced by Kaplan for construing kaplanian contents as temporal propositions.) But Lewis 1980 argued that the intermediate level of kaplanian content can actually be dispensed with if, without otherwise changing the theory, we take sentence meanings to be functions from context-and-circumstance to truth-value (rather than as functions from contexts to functions from circumstances to truth-values). On Lewis' equivalent story we end up with only two levels : sentence meaning (Lewisian semantic value) and assertoric content.

These issues are best seen as related. As Stalnaker puts it, positing middlemen (as Kaplan does) is worthwhile only if they have some extra work to do. Here the extra work is presumably made necessary by the need to connect the theory of language to the theory of thought and communication. We need to work out the connection before we can adjudicate the debate between Kaplan and Lewis.⁴ For the time being, however, I want to focus on an assumption shared by all the views I have considered so far :

The Determination Thesis

Linguistic meaning as determined by grammar determines assertoric/doxastic content, either in zero step (linguistic meaning is content), or in one step (character or Lewisian semantic value determines content) or in two steps (character determines kaplanian content which determines assertoric content).

I think the Determination Thesis cannot be maintained, and I will argue this point by looking at a much debated case : that of demonstratives.

II. Rejecting the Determination Thesis

As is well-known, demonstratives (including pronouns on their demonstrative uses) behave differently than what Kaplan calls 'pure indexicals'. Pure indexicals are associated with a rule which fixes the reference in context, e.g. the rule that 'I' refers to the speaker. For demonstratives such as 'that' or 'she', there is no such rule. The speaker is free to refer to whatever he wants, within limits (the reference has to satisfy the presuppositions encoded by the expression). Thus 'she' may refer to any female person the speaker has in mind. The absence of a linguistic rule of reference makes it necessary for the speaker to indicate to the audience what he is talking about, via a 'demonstration' (Kaplan 1989a) which reveals his 'directing intention' (Kaplan 1989b). The demonstration may take any form (pointing, direction of gaze, etc.), and it may be unnecessary if the context makes it clear what the speaker is referring to.

In the interest of unification, it has been suggested that demonstratives too are associated with a rule of reference (a 'character'), but one that acknowledges the role of the demonstration. On this view a demonstrative refers to what the speaker 'demonstrates' — that's the linguistic rule. This extension of the notion of character to demonstratives may or

⁴ See the conclusion, for an argument that the middlemen (Kaplanian contents) play a role in the theory of assertion.

may not be acceptable, depending on the theoretical project one is pursuing. If what is at stake is the Determination Thesis, the extension is suspicious and I think it should be resisted.

One should *not* attempt to save the Determination Thesis (according to which grammatical meaning determines content) by arguing that demonstratives, too, have a character which determines their content. Arguing in that way would be ‘cheating’ (Recanati 2001) because the alleged determination works only if the reference is already determined by the demonstration. The role of the demonstration in the alleged rule of reference establishes that what actually determines reference is the speaker’s intention (provided that intention is made manifest to the hearer via the demonstration). But if it is the speaker’s intention, it is not the grammatical meaning of the demonstrative that fixes the reference. On the suggested proposal, grammatical meaning fixes reference but does so only *redundantly*. That is not the sense of ‘determination’ that matters to the Determination Thesis. The Thesis cannot be saved by arguing that the linguistic meaning of the demonstrative (the rule that it refers to what the speaker demonstrates) redundantly determines its pre-determined referent.

I will return to the ‘cheating’ objection in a moment. First, however, we must consider the *prima facie* problem which demonstratives raise for Kaplan’s theory of indexicals, based on the notion of *character*, and the two responses which Kaplan himself considered in reaction to that problem.

Characters, for Kaplan, are functions from contexts to contents, and the content of an indexical is the object it refers to (or a constant function to that object). Since the character of an indexical is its linguistic meaning — a property of the expression-type — two occurrences of the same indexical in the same context are bound to refer to the same thing. But that is not what we find with demonstratives. Two occurrences of the same demonstrative (type) in one and the same sentence (uttered in a given context) may refer to distinct objects and thus carry different contents. Thus an utterance of ‘That is F but that is not F’, or of ‘That is not identical to that’, may be *true* — if the two occurrences of ‘that’ refer to distinct objects. No such thing is possible with pure indexicals such as ‘I’ or ‘yesterday’. Sentences like (3) and (4) below are false in every context.

It follows that Kaplan’s theory of indexicals does not immediately apply to demonstratives. In contrast to pure indexicals, demonstratives do not possess a character *in virtue of being of a certain type*. Only occurrences of a given demonstrative type (accompanied by a suitable demonstration/directing intention) carry a character. Because, for demonstratives, characters are associated with occurrences and not directly with the expression-type, two occurrences of the same demonstrative type may carry distinct characters, and determine different contents in the same context. Kaplan therefore puts forward the following theory for demonstratives :

Kaplan on Demonstratives (1) : the Hybrid Theory

Demonstratives are incomplete. They do not have a character unless they are completed by a ‘demonstration’. Only the pair <demonstrative, demonstration> has a full-fledged character.⁵

I call Kaplan’s first theory the ‘hybrid theory’ because it is similar to Frege’s theory of ‘hybrid proper names’ (Künne 1992, Textor 2007). For Frege it’s not the indexical as expression type, but the linguistic expression together with some aspect of the context of utterance, which has sense. In an ideal language the same expression type will always carry the same sense, but in languages with demonstratives that is clearly not the case. With respect to such languages, we must distinguish between the linguistic, conventional meaning of a

⁵ I abstract from the ‘separability’ issue, which Kaplan discusses at length but which is orthogonal to the present discussion.

demonstrative (type) and the character of an occurrence of that demonstrative (paired with an appropriate demonstration).

Most important for a logic of demonstratives, it is not irrational to hold ‘that is F but that is not F’, or ‘That is not identical to that’, *even if the two occurrences of the demonstrative ‘that’ refer to the same object*. That is not irrational because that is not internally inconsistent (inconsistent for the subject who holds the thought or, in Kaplan’s framework, inconsistent at the level of character). Internal inconsistency arises only if the same demonstration or directing intention is associated with the two occurrences of the demonstrative. If we use subscripts to represent the associated demonstrations, there will be a difference in character between

(1) he_1 is F but he_1 is not F

and

(2) he_1 is F but he_2 is not F

In virtue of its character, (1) is bound to yield an inconsistent content : whatever the context, (1) says that one and the same object is and is not F. This is like the automatic inconsistency we get if we substitute a pure indexical for the demonstrative :

(3) Yesterday was F but yesterday was not F

(4) I am F but I am not F

As I said already, these sentences are false in every context. But (2) is not inconsistent at the level of character. In (2), ‘ he_1 ’ and ‘ he_2 ’ may corefer, but whether or not they do depends upon the context. Their coreference can only be *de facto*, not *de jure*. In some contexts the character of (2) will determine an inconsistent content (if ‘ he_1 ’ and ‘ he_2 ’ turn out to corefer), but in other contexts it will determine a content that is true. Placing character at the level of occurrences rather than expression-types therefore makes it possible to distinguish two possible readings for a sentence like ‘He is French but he is not French’, one which is internally inconsistent and one which isn’t.⁶ (This solves Gauker’s dilemma: see Gauker 2014, 292.)

Kaplan’s theory introduces a distinction between the linguistic, conventional meaning of a demonstrative (type) and the character of an occurrence of that demonstrative (paired with an appropriate demonstration). Since linguistic meaning (a property of expression types) is no longer equated to character (a property of occurrences), we now get a *four-level* picture :

The Four-Level View

Linguistic meaning, together with the required demonstrations, determines character ; character, together with context, determines kaplanian content ; kaplanian content, together with context, determines assertoric content.

⁶ See Fiengo and May 1994. Kaplan would handle this case differently. He takes pronouns to be fundamentally ambiguous (Kaplan 1989b : 572), and would argue that the second occurrence of ‘he’ in (1) is anaphoric, not demonstrative. As he puts it, ‘every new syntactic occurrence of a true demonstrative requires not just a referent-determining intention, but a new referent-determining intention’ (Kaplan 1989b : 588).

This may be a little too much, and one may be tempted to preserve the equation ‘linguistic meaning = character’. This can be done in two ways, one of which corresponds to Kaplan’s second theory.

First, we can take the context relative to which demonstratives are interpreted to be so fine-grained that every syntactic occurrence of a demonstrative is associated with a distinct context. I have myself put forward a theory according to which the context relevant to the interpretation of an expression is not the context *c* in which the sentence in which the expression occurs is uttered, but the sub-context *c'* in which the expression itself (but not the rest of the sentence) is uttered.⁷ On this view, if a sentence with two occurrences of the same demonstrative is uttered in *c*, what is relevant to the semantic value of the demonstratives (the argument to the character function) is not the context *c* but the *sub-context* *c'* in which the demonstrative, but not the rest of the sentence, is uttered. The two occurrences end up being evaluated with respect to distinct contexts, so they can refer to distinct objects. This analysis is inspired both by the Reichenbachian notion of ‘token-reflexivity’ and by the idea that the context ‘continually shifts’ (Stalnaker) as the utterance proceeds. If the context can shift intra-sententially, there is no reason why two occurrences of the same demonstrative in a sentence could not be interpreted with respect to different contexts.⁸

This view seems to take us away from a semantics of occurrences into a semantics of utterances — the sort of thing Kaplan wants to resist (Kaplan 1989b : 584-85).⁹ But there is another way in which we can preserve the equation *linguistic meaning* = *character*, which does not involve any significant departure from Kaplan’s framework.

Let us construe the demonstrated objects themselves as aspects of the context, on which the kaplanian content depends. If we enrich the context that serves as argument to the character function with a full assignment of demonstrata, we can maintain that two occurrences of the same demonstrative type have the same character even though they may refer to distinct objects in the same context. That is the gist of Kaplan’s second theory of demonstratives :

Kaplan on Demonstratives (2) : the Indexical Theory

As expression-types, demonstratives have a character (fixed by the rules of the language). The character of a demonstrative determines its content with respect to a specific contextual parameter : that of the object demonstrated. The *n*-th demonstrative in a sentence refers to the *n*-th item in the sequence of demonstrated objects that features in the context for that sentence.

On this theory, two occurrences of the same demonstrative may determine distinct referents in the same context not because the occurrences do not share the same character, nor because the context shifts between one occurrence and the next, but because the context which is the argument to the character function includes *an assignment of objects to each of the occurrences of the demonstrative*. The context now contains something that, for each occurrence of a demonstrative, determines what that occurrence refers to. For each occurrence of the demonstrative, the character of the demonstrative (fixed once for all by the rules of the language) and the context (which now contains an assignment of object to each

⁷ I assume that if a complex expression $\alpha*\beta$ is used in a context *c*, each of its constituents is used in a sub-part of *c*, for example α in *c*¹ and β in *c*² (Recanati 2010 : 44).

⁸ Several authors, such as Braun (1996) and Rabern (2014), take demonstratives themselves to shift, or update, the context.

⁹ See Garcia-Carpintero (1998) and Perry (2012) for a defence of utterance-based semantics. Salmon (2006) assigns semantic values not to expressions in isolation but to expressions in a linguistic environment. This seems to achieve the required desired fine-grainedness of context, without moving to an utterance-based semantics.

demonstrative) fix the content of each occurrence of the demonstrative in the sentence : that content, for each occurrence, is the object assigned to that occurrence in the context.

This theory amounts to feeding an assignment function into the context. Formally this is fine, but in the context of the present discussion (about the Determination Thesis) the theory raises the objection I mentioned above. The issue we are concerned with is whether grammatical meaning determines content. One cannot argue that it does, simply because the aspects of content which grammatical meaning does *not* determine can be (pre-semantically) fed into the context that serves as argument to the character function.

Putting the demonstrated object into the context, as Kaplan's indexical theory does, violates a constraint on contextual parameters which Brandom formulates as follows (by 'semantic indices' Brandom means 'contextual parameters'):

Brandom's constraint

What I want to call 'genuine' semantic indices are features of utterances that can be read off without knowing anything about what the utterance means. Time, place, speaker, and possible world are properties of tokenings that can be settled and specified before one turns one's attention to the content expressed by those tokenings. (...) [They] can be determined independently of [the context-sensitive expression's] semantic value and then appealed to as input from which the value could then be computed by a character-function. (Brandom 2008 : 58)

According to Brandom, the contextual parameters on which content depends must be properties of tokenings that can be determined *independently* of content — independently of what the speaker is saying. Because they are used to *determine* content, the contextual parameters themselves cannot *depend upon* the content. But in the case of demonstratives, analysed as per Kaplan's indexical theory, the relevant contextual feature (the object referred to by the speaker) is the content we are after ! This, Brandom suggests, is circular.

Let me spell out the objection. The idea that indexicals have characters which determine their content in context suggests a *procedure* whereby a language user can access the content of an utterance, by grasping the rule (the character function) and applying it to the context at hand. But in the case of demonstratives, the content an interpreter is trying to determine (the referent of the demonstrative) is fed into the context so it must be *already* be accessible in order to apply the character function. We must understand what or who the speaker is talking about ('speaker's reference') in order to understand what the demonstrative, in the speaker's mouth, refers to. But that means that the grammatical meaning of the demonstrative type does not *determine* the reference of the demonstrative in context.¹⁰ It constrains the reference (which has to satisfy the presuppositions encoded by e.g. gender or number features), but what actually (i.e. *non-redundantly*) determines the reference is something else than grammatical meaning : it is speaker's meaning.

Speaker's meaning assigns referents to each occurrence of the demonstrative. Feeding the assignment into the context is formally ok but cannot rescue the idea that grammatical meaning determines content in the face of the demonstrative counterexamples. Semantic reference for demonstratives piggybacks on speaker's reference. Only if this is fully

¹⁰ Kent Bach and Stephen Neale have repeatedly complained that 'determination' (in my work and the work of others) is ambiguous between a metaphysical and an epistemological sense. But even though my talk of procedure is epistemological, my point about 'determination' applies across the board, which is why I don't care so much about the distinction.

acknowledged is the formal move (putting the assignment function into the context) theoretically acceptable.¹¹

A meta-theoretic argument in favour of Kaplan's indexical theory is that it unifies demonstratives and pure indexicals by assigning them all a character modeled after the character of pure indexicals. But the argument is not compelling, because the unification can proceed in the other direction as well. We may start with demonstratives, where speaker's reference determines semantic reference, and extend the analysis to pure indexicals.

The presuppositional approach to indexical reference discussed in Schlenker 2005a takes the pure indexicals to be a limiting case of a demonstrative. A third person pronoun like 'he' or 'she' semantically refers to the speaker's reference, whatever it is, provided it satisfies the (meager) presupposition carried by the pronoun. In the case of a pure indexical like the first person pronoun 'I' the presupposition is much more specific — so specific that it is uniquely identifying. The referent of 'I' must be the speaker (the person making the utterance). Here, in contrast to the third person case, the presupposition is satisfied by a unique object. The general rule for the interpretation of pronouns still applies, however: the semantic reference is the value of the (speaker-referential) contextual assignment, provided it satisfies the presupposition.

If, with 'I', the speaker refers to an object which does not satisfy the presupposition, the occurrence of 'I' fails to semantically refer. Schlenker says that examples are difficult to find, because 'in general one has a clear idea who one is trying to refer to when one utters the pronoun I.' Here is a putative example. Imagine that I am watching a film in which I (wrongly) think I recognize myself, and that I say, pointing to the character on the screen which I take to be myself: 'Look, my pants are on fire!' I refer to the character on the screen, which I take to be myself, and since that individual (whose pants are on fire) is not myself, the presupposition carried by 'I' is not satisfied and the occurrence fails to refer semantically. Schlenker gives a similar example involving the pronoun 'you':

Suppose that I am pointing towards one person (say, to my right) while talking to another person (to my left). If I then utter *You are nice* with emphasis on *you* and a correlative pointing gesture, the result is decidedly odd — in the same way as if, pointing towards John, I were to say: *She is nice*. This is a welcome result: a presupposition failure is predicted because the person that is pointed to is not an addressee of the speech act (similarly, *she is nice* is odd when pointing to John because *she* carries a presupposition that it denotes a female individual). (Schlenker 2005a : 162)

To sum up, we may unify the theory of indexicals and demonstratives either by extending to demonstratives the kaplanian model of the pure indexicals whose linguistic meaning is a character (a function from contexts to contents), or by extending to pure indexicals the model of demonstratives as free-variable-like expressions whose content results from a contextual assignment of speaker's reference (under constraints). Either way, we must acknowledge the difference between pure indexicals and demonstratives. While putting forward the indexical theory, Kaplan says that it 'still allows us to distinguish the true demonstratives from the pure indexicals. The parameters for the latter are brute facts of the context, like location and time,' while the parameter for demonstratives is a contextual assignment of speaker's referents (Kaplan 1989b : 588). The presuppositional theorist also has to acknowledge the fact that, with pure indexicals, the speaker's reference is redundant in the

¹¹ Kaplan accepts the primacy of speaker's reference for demonstratives, so his version of the indexical theory is beyond reproach.

sense that the presupposition carried by the expression is (already) uniquely identifying. The speaker's reference cannot affect the semantic reference, which is pre-determined linguistically, but only determines *whether or not* the expression carries semantic reference (in the presuppositional framework, the expression refers — carries semantic value — only if the object the presupposition determines is the same as the speaker's referent.)

According to Schlenker (2005a), the theory that treats both demonstrative and indexical pronouns as free variables associated with presuppositions has an advantage over Kaplan's indexical theory which treats them as having characters which (redundantly or non-redundantly) determine their reference. Through the postulation of the variable it makes it possible to account for various *binding phenomena*, which Kaplan's theory leaves unexplained.

Binding phenomena have also been invoked to criticize Kaplan's theory, on the grounds that kaplanian contents cannot play the role of compositional semantic values. In 'he is tall', Rabern (2012) points out, the kaplanian content involves the value of the contextual assignment of a particular individual to the pronoun 'he'. But that value drops out of the picture entirely if the sentence is inserted in a quantificational environment and the pronoun bound: 'everyone_i believes that he_i is tall'. This raises a problem if we want to maintain that kaplanian contents are compositional semantic values. The kaplanian content of 'he is tall' is a singular proposition with the reference of 'he' as a constituent, but the compositional semantic value of the sentence, which may occur both in isolation and embedded, must abstract from the reference the pronoun takes when uttered in isolation (see Salmon 2006 for similar remarks).

Rabern appeals to the Dummett-Evans-Lewis distinction between semantic value and assertoric content, and argues that the reference of free-variable-like expressions (e.g. demonstratives) belongs to the level of assertoric content, not to that of semantic value. The compositional semantic value of a variable is not the value assigned to that variable (or a constant function to that value), as Kaplan says, but a non-constant function from assignments to values. Rabern concludes that, 'where compositionality is concerned, it was a mistake for Kaplan to put the assignment function in the context rather than in the index' (Rabern 2012, n. 32). Kaplan explicitly construes the reference of free variables as a determinant of semantic value, rather than merely as a determinant of assertoric content. He writes: 'The assignment, as I am arguing we should conceive of it, is not 'evaluating' the variable at a world, rather it is generating an element of content, and it is the content which is then evaluated at a world' (Kaplan 1989b : 591). But for Rabern, the reference of a demonstrative is given by the assignment that is part of the index (the point of evaluation), so the reference only belongs to the level of assertoric content. It does not belong to the sort of content we need for compositionality purposes (what Dummett calls 'ingredient sense').

It is to be noted that Schlenker himself puts the assignment function into the index, in the form of a sequence of evaluation containing the discourse participants and the various objects of discourse.¹² Demonstratives and other referential expressions manipulate the sequence, by adding the speaker's referent on top of it. Anaphoric pronouns and pure indexical like 'I' work differently – they pick up a pre-existing element of the sequence and move it to the top of the sequence.

These views suggest that the semantic value of a sentence is not a classical proposition, not even a temporal proposition, but a property of richer indices. This takes us close to Lewis' theory of centered content; a good result if we want the theory of thought (which was Lewis' primary concern) to mesh with semantics. If Rabern and Schlenker are

¹² 'In our system, predicates are true at a sequence in the same way that in propositional modal logic a proposition is true at a world' (Schlenker 2005b : 5n).

right, the rich index includes a sequence of objects. In the centered worlds literature, several authors have similarly argued that thought contents should be *multi*-centered, which means that the index ought to include what Ninan (2008) calls a *res*-sequence — a sequence of objects (see also Torre 2010 for a similar view). The internal content of the thought and the sentence's semantic value now come out similar, and this opens up interesting perspectives for the theory of how thought connects to language.

As far as the main issue of this section — the Determination Thesis — is concerned, it does not matter where one puts the assignment function — in the index or in the context. What matters is that to reach assertoric content we need to appeal to speaker's reference, thus injecting a dose of speaker's meaning into the semantic machinery. There is no alternative way to assign contextual values to demonstratives — no 'brute fact of the context' (Kaplan 1989b : 588) can do the job. This applies not only to the assignment of contextual values to demonstratives, but also to the assignment of contextual values to so-called 'contextual expressions' (Clark 1992), and more generally to all free variables in logical form.¹³ More important, these considerations apply just as well to the contextual selection of a particular index of evaluation for the expressed content.

In Kaplan's 3-level picture, the context comes into play twice, first to determine the kaplanian content (2nd level) and then to determine the circumstance with respect to which that content is to be evaluated (3rd level). Now what determines the relevant circumstance in context? This is entirely a matter of speaker's meaning. If I say 'It is raining', the place with respect to which the place-neutral content of the utterance is to be evaluated need not be the place of utterance. In general, the circumstance of evaluation need not be the 'circumstance of the context'. It is a circumstance determined by the speaker's intention (modulo the usual restrictions). So if we follow Rabern *et al.* and construe the sequence of evaluation as part of the index, we haven't in the least diminished the need to acknowledge the crucial role of speaker's meaning in determining assertoric content.

III. Semantic Entry Points for Speaker's Meaning

I have argued that grammatical meaning does not determine assertoric content, but merely constrains it. Speaker's meaning necessarily comes into play. Here, I am concerned with the extent of the phenomenon. When and where, exactly, does speaker's meaning come into the picture?

As we have just seen, demonstrative reference is a case in point. But what is true of demonstrative reference can be extended to *reference* in general. I have argued elsewhere that a referential expression (*any* referential expression) inherits its reference from an associated 'mental file'. If that is right, then all reference is speaker's reference.¹⁴ Josh Dever also argued for this view in his dissertation, and Hawthorne and Manley come to similar conclusions in their recent book (Hawthorne and Manley 2012).

The second area in which, arguably, speaker's meaning comes into play to fix assertoric content is *quantification*. There is no quantification without an implicit domain of quantification, that is, without a speaker-meant restriction on the domain of quantification. The restriction may be empty, but that is only a special case — the case in which the selected domain is the 'universal' domain, assuming there is such a thing.

¹³ In his dissertation (Dever 1998), Josh Dever argued that all referential expressions are free variables in logical form, endowed with speaker's reference at the level of assertoric content.

¹⁴ This does not mean that we lose the speaker's reference/semantic reference distinction. See Recanati forthcoming *a*.

Hawthorne and Manley try to reduce the context-sensitivity of reference to the context-sensitivity of quantification. There is no reference in language, they speculate ; all reference is made through *singular restrictions* over the domain of quantification.¹⁵ In this way they simplify the theory : there is only one entry point for speaker's meaning, that which is afforded by quantificational domain restriction.

While acknowledging the elegance of the resulting theory, I find it implausible. Reference is a fundamental function in human speech, so it would be very strange (and in need of explanation) if reference was not somehow encoded in the language system (as it is, if we accept that there are *referential expressions*).¹⁶ Be that as it may, rather than trying to minimize the semantic entry points for speaker's meaning, my inclination is to multiply them. The idea is that speech, in general, rests on speaker's meaning, so that every basic speech function should be expected to display speaker-meaning-dependency. We have just considered two such basic functions (reference and quantification) and I am going to consider two others : assertion and predication.

As Davidson (1979) emphasized, the assertive force of an utterance cannot be encoded, so *assertion* must be fundamentally a matter of speaker's meaning. The notion of assertion (or the more general notion of force) is ambiguous, as Hare pointed out long time ago (Hare 1970), so let's disambiguate the claim I have just made on behalf of Davidson. The *type* of speech act which a sentence is designed to perform (assertion vs order or question) is encoded through sentence mood and other indicators ; what cannot be encoded is *whether or not* the speaker is actually performing the encoded speech act. *That* the speaker is asserting (if she is) is something that can only be determined by considering the context and the speaker's likely intentions.

It might be objected that this is true but irrelevant. Force and content are *distinct dimensions*. It follows that the part played by speaker's meaning at the speech act level (the level of force) does not establish that a similar part is played by speaker's meaning at the level of content. According to the objection, it is misleading to present assertion as a *semantic* entry point for speaker's meaning. Insofar as it is force-determining, speaker's meaning does not affect semantic content at all.

I acknowledge that, according to Fregean orthodoxy, force does not affect content ; but that cannot be presupposed in the present context without begging the question. In section II I argued that the utterance's *assertoric content* depends upon the selected point of evaluation. The selection of the point of evaluation itself is a matter of force, as I am about to show. Assertion serves as a semantic entry-point for speaker's meaning, on my view, *because* assertive force does affect assertoric content (contrary to Fregean orthodoxy).

In the situation-theoretic framework inspired by Austin's theory of truth, and assumed here, every utterance (or thought) is about a situation which it characterizes as being of a certain type. The utterance (or thought) is true if and only if the topic situation is of that type. Assertion consists in presenting the topic situation as being of that type, that is, in undertaking the commitment that it *is* of that type. I will use the situation-theoretic framework in the conclusion to make sense of Kaplan's postulation of an intermediate level of content (the kaplanian content or, in my framework, the *lekton*). For the time being, I want to emphasize, first, that the situation an utterance is about is entirely a matter of speaker's meaning. One and the same sentence can be evaluated against *any* situation. Second, at an intuitive level, the truth-conditions of the utterance depend upon the situation which is contextually selected as relevant. This gives rise to a generalized form of context-sensitivity. An utterance which says that *p* and concerns a situation *s* is true if and only if, in *s*, it is the case that *p* . Even if the

¹⁵ The notion of a singleton restrictor comes from Schwartzschild (2002).

¹⁶ I owe this point to Michael Devitt.

sentence is devoid of indexicals or other context-sensitive expression — even if it is an eternal sentence endowed with absolute truth-conditions and expressing a classical proposition — the truth-conditions of the utterance may vary more or less indefinitely because of the involvement of the topic situation. In such a case there are two propositions to consider : the internal proposition (the proposition that *p*, expressed by the sentence), and the ‘Austinian proposition’ that *in s*, *it is the case that p*. The Austinian proposition *is* the assertoric content : the speaker’s commitment is to the truth of the internal proposition (the proposition that *p*) *when evaluated against the topic situation*.

Test cases for the distinction are provided by examples in which the truth-value of the Austinian proposition diverges from the truth-value of the ‘internal’ proposition (the *lekton*). An example from Barwise and Etchemendy, which I have used many times, illustrates such a divergence (Barwise and Etchemendy 1987 : 29). If, commenting on a poker scene I am watching, I say ‘Claire has a good hand now’, my utterance is intuitively false, or at least not true, if it turns out that Claire is not one of the players, contrary to my mistaken impression. But the proposition that Claire has a good hand now may well be literally true, if Claire turns out to be playing bridge across town and has a good hand at the time of speech. A proper theory of assertoric content has to acknowledge the Austinian proposition as the relevant level for normatively assessing the assertion as correct or incorrect. The utterance is incorrect because the target situation (the poker game I am watching) is not of the relevant type — it is not a situation in which Claire has a good hand (even though some other situation is).

In Lewis’ theory of the *de se*, the content expressed by ‘I am thirsty’ is a property (being thirsty) which the subject self-ascribes. Self-ascription is a matter of force, in Lewis’ framework. To assert that one is thirsty *is* to self-ascribe the property of being thirsty. The self-ascription is not an element of content, for Lewis : the content is the property of being thirsty. Still, the full assertoric content of the utterance involves the subject. To evaluate the assertion as correct or incorrect we have to evaluate the content (the property) ‘at’ the subject who self-ascribes it. Suppose John is the self-ascriber. Then the utterance is true if and only if John is thirsty. The act of assertion (understood as self-ascription) fixes the relevant point of evaluation for the content, and thereby affects assertoric content.

I conclude that assertion *is* a semantic entry point for speaker’s meaning. The speaker’s act of assertion comprises several ancillary acts, including the selection of a particular situation as ‘topic situation’. That ancillary act affects assertoric content, because the topic situation is a constituent in the Austinian proposition which is the utterance’s assertoric content ;¹⁷ or, in more neutral terms, because assertoric content is a function of the situation of evaluation targeted by the act of assertion.

The semantic entry points I have considered so far correspond to reference, quantification, and assertion. What about predication ? Is it, too, a semantic entry point for speaker’s meaning ? I think it is.

By and large, twentieth-century philosophy of language has been guilty of ignoring the context sensitivity of predication. Only lip-service has been paid to the phenomenon of *polysemy*, considered as a form of ambiguity and therefore discarded as ‘pre-semantic’ (the properly semantic work of interpretation starts *after* a particular meaning has been selected). Note that there was a time when indexicality itself was considered a form of ambiguity (and discarded as pre-semantic). Indexicals were called ‘systematically ambiguous expressions’. Indexicality is now recognized for what it is (a form of context-sensitivity), and I believe it is time to move on and recognize that polysemy, too, is a form of context-sensitivity.

¹⁷ By talking of constituents of the Austinian proposition, I assume a structured proposition framework (where Austinian propositions are pairs of a possibly relativized proposition and a situation) ; but nothing hinges on this choice.

Contrary to a widespread assumption, lexical items of the predicative variety do not encode ready-made predicates to be delivered on demand. Some work is needed to get to predicates. Lexical items encode something more abstract and schematic — a conceptual structure, with ‘slots’, ‘variables’ or ‘roles’ to which particular values may/must be assigned. Fillmore calls such a conceptual structure a ‘frame’ (Fillmore 1982, 1985). I claim that the contribution which a given lexical item makes to content — the *predicate* it contributes in context — depends upon the assignment of values to the roles in the semantic frame associated with the lexical item. (Not all the roles in the frame are assigned values in the course of interpretation ; those that aren’t are existentially quantified.)

As Fillmore emphasized, polysemy is not a feature of linguistic meaning itself : it is due to the fact that the meaning of a lexical item is, or involves, a semantic frame with argument roles. There are different ways to fill the roles of the frame in context, and this potentially generates different readings for the same expression. I am now going to illustrate that phenomenon.

Consider the following three sentences, involving one and the same the lexical item (the adjective ‘safe’).¹⁸

- (1) The beach is safe
- (2) The children are safe
- (3) The shovel is safe

The readings of ‘safe’ are different in the three sentences, in the sense that different properties are ascribed to the subject of these sentences. We can represent the properties with subscripts (associated with a very rough informal gloss) :

- (1*) The beach is safe₁ (no harmful event is likely to take place there)
- (2*) The children are safe₂ (they can’t be harmed)
- (3*) The shovel is safe₃ (no harm can result from its use)

These readings, however, result from interpretive processes which can also generate *other* readings, by rearranging the contextual assignment of values to the roles in the semantic frame associated with ‘safe’ (the RISK frame).¹⁹ As Fauconnier and Turner point out, it is possible to generate a range of distinct readings for any one of the sentences (1) to (3), by manipulating the context and especially the topic situation. For example, the shovel in (3) can be ‘safe’ not because it is likely to cause no harm to the child who is using it (*safe*₃), but because it is unbreakable and therefore protected from harm caused by the child (*safe*₂). Different properties are ascribed to the shovel on these two readings : the shovel may be safe in one sense but not in the other sense. Similarly, sentence (1) can take several readings, as illustrated by the following examples :

- (1*) The beach is safe₁. Our stuff can be left unattended.
- (1**) The beach is safe₂. The judge has just declared the development project illegal, so our favourite spot will not be destroyed after all.
- (1***) The beach is safe₄, we can’t lose money on that thanks to the Mayor, but the hotel is risky.

¹⁸ This example comes from Fauconnier and Turner (2002 : 25-27).

¹⁹ On the RISK frame, see Fillmore and Atkins (1992).

Which reading we get for (1) depends on which role in the frame the subject of the sentence is assigned to : the LOCATION role (the role of the place where HARM can occur), as in (1*) ; the VICTIM role (the entity that is harmed), as in (1**) ; or the role of the ACTION from which HARM may follow, as in (1***). This last reading is hard to get because the DP ‘the beach’ does not literally refer to an action, but the meaning of the noun ‘beach’ can be adjusted to that reading through ‘modulation’ (Recanati 2004, 2010). In (1***), ‘the beach’ is understood metonymically as referring e.g. to the beach development project, a project which may be said to be safe in the sense that carrying it out (an action) involves no risk of losing money. ‘The hotel’ also refers metonymically to the hotel project, a project that might generate losses more easily than the beach project.

There are other readings for these sentences, corresponding to other roles in the RISK frame (e.g. the ASSET role — the entity whose loss constitutes the harm). Moreover, as one might expect, the readings multiply as the number of arguments increases. Thus the following sentence, containing a transitive verb associated with the RISK frame, gives rise to *seven* distinct readings :

(4) John risked a trip into the jungle

Which reading we get for (4) depends upon whether John is the VICTIM or the ACTOR (or both) and whether ‘a trip to the jungle’ is seen as the HARM, as the ACTION from which HARM may result, as the ASSET that one does not want to lose. When the subject is the actor, the verb means ‘take risk’ rather than ‘run risk’, and the question arises whether the victim is the actor or someone else.

Let us return to the main issue. We ascribe different properties to the shovel depending on the interpretation we choose for ‘safe’ in the sentence ‘the shovel is safe’. That is what I mean when I say that the predicate *safe*₁ is distinct from the predicates *safe*₂ and *safe*₃. But these distinct predicates all result from an operation on the same frame. The word ‘safe’ contributes the RISK frame, together with a negative component (safety is the absence of risk). The frame is not a predicate but a schematic, determinable representation of a situation-type, to be made determinate in the interpretation process. On the view I am arguing for, the predicates that are ascribed in context to e.g. the shovel are generated as a *by-product* of the process of making the schematic representation of a situation type determinate. To make it determinate, values are assigned to roles in the frame, drawn from two main sources : the context (including the topic situation), and the other constituents in the sentence, whose values are linked to the frame.

Which role the value of a given constituent may be assigned to is constrained by the grammar, but a good deal of latitude remains, which provides an entry-point for speaker’s meaning. Thus in (3), as I pointed out, the shovel may play either the role of VICTIM or the role of HARMFUL ENTITY. In a remote context it could play the LOCATION role, which the beach plays in (1*). It could play also the ASSET role (if the shovel is a solid gold 5th century tool which has just been unearthed and put into a safe). It must be acknowledged that, in some sense, the meaning of ‘safe’ varies depending on the interpretation we choose : we ascribe different properties to the shovel, so distinct truth-conditions are generated. But the *lexical meaning* of ‘safe’ does not vary. What varies is what I have called the ‘occasion meaning’ (Recanati 2010). I conclude that we must posit two distinct semantic levels here, just as we do for indexicals.

IV. Conclusion

The Determination Thesis is inseparable from a general picture of the relation between linguistic meaning and utterance content, which we can represent as follows :

Linguistic meaning + context → semantic content
Semantic content + context → speech act content

It is a familiar and widespread picture. Linguistic meaning determines semantic content in context, in a rule-governed manner. Speaker's meaning comes into the picture after semantic content, at the level of speech act content. The overall content of the speech act (including its implicatures) depends upon what is said and the context in which it is said. What is said *also* is context-dependent, but the context-dependence of semantic content is supposed to be context-dependence of a different kind. Semantic content is supposed to depend on properties of the situation of utterance that are, by and large, independent of speaker's meaning and speech act content.

Demonstratives, I argued, are clear counterexamples to that picture. The value assigned to a demonstrative is an object determined by an act of speaker's reference. More generally, assertoric content turns out to rest on speaker's meaning, at various levels. Predication, reference and quantification all involve speaker's meaning and cannot proceed without it. So the distinction between semantic content and speech act content is shakier than people tend to realize.

Contrary to Fregean orthodoxy, I have argued that assertion — the illocutionary act performed by the speaker — itself plays a role in shaping assertoric content. Just as in the theory of thought, we need to distinguish two levels of content for utterances. Assertion consists in presenting a (relativized or classical) proposition as true with respect to some 'topic situation'. The content to be evaluated at the topic situation corresponds to Kaplan's 'what is said', or to my '*lekton*' (Recanati 2007). It is not the full assertoric content. The full assertoric content is determined when the relevant situation of evaluation is fixed by speaker's meaning. It is this mechanism which Kaplan describes in the case of tensed utterances : the kaplanian content is a temporal proposition, but the utterance is true iff the temporal proposition in question is true at the relevant time (the time of utterance). The time and world of utterance come into the picture when the assertion is made and the content of the utterance is *applied* to the relevant circumstance.

Kaplan takes the kaplanian content to be the compositional 'semantic value' of the sentence (with respect to context), but this view has been criticized as resting on an inappropriate semantics for variables. Rabern argues that the semantic value of a variable is not the object assigned to that variable, as in Kaplan's framework, but a function from assignments to values. The object assigned to the variable is only its assertoric content. As Rabern puts it, 'the lesson to draw from looking at the embedding behavior of context-sensitive (and assignment-sensitive) expressions is that the assertoric content of an expression need not be identified with the compositional semantic value of an expression' (p. 16).

I agree with Rabern that we should demote kaplanian contents from the role of compositional semantic value. Given that semantic values are what compositional semantics assigns to expressions, and given that compositional semantics is that branch of linguistics which deals with the linguistic meaning of expressions, we should *equate* semantic value and linguistic meaning, instead of positing a context-dependent semantic value, as Kaplan does. In this respect, Lewisian semantic values fare better than kaplanian contents. But that does not mean that we should dispense with kaplanian contents altogether, as Lewis suggests, or that we should equate kaplanian content and assertoric content, as Rabern suggests.

The kaplanian content of an utterance corresponds to the property of situations which, in asserting the sentence, one ascribes to the topic situation. The full assertoric content

depends, in addition, upon the selection of a particular situation as topic situation. On this picture we need kaplanian contents not because they play the role of compositional semantic value, but because they play a role in the theory of assertion. Lewis himself has something akin to kaplanian content in his framework : the property which the subject self-ascribes. That property is the content of the *de se* assertion, but the full assertoric content goes beyond that, as we have seen : the *de se* assertion is correct if and only if *the subject herself* has the self-ascribed property

Although I have talked about levels of content at great length (both for utterances and thoughts), the main claim of the paper has been that, in the analysis of language, we should give up the Determination Thesis. Doing so encourages us to neatly separate content from semantic value, to appreciate that distinct constraints apply to them, and to acknowledge the role of pragmatics in the generation of the former from the latter.

On the view I advocate, semantic values are linguistic meanings (as they are for Lewis); so, in addition to the *Compositionality constraint*, they satisfy the *Modularity constraint* : they can be calculated simply in virtue of one's knowledge of the language (Borg 2004). Neither Kaplanian contents nor assertoric contents can be semantic values if that constraint holds, for they depend upon speaker's meaning and can't be calculated in abstraction from the pragmatics.

Contents, in general, don't satisfy the Modularity constraint which semantic values ought to satisfy, but they satisfy another constraint, which semantic values do not satisfy. That is the *Availability constraint* (Recanati 1993, 2002, 2004): while semantic values may be 'cognized' by anyone who masters the language, they are arguably too abstract to serve as object of thought at the personal level. Understanding a sentence, at the personal level, involves more than merely accessing the abstract meaning of the sentence (something that takes place at the sub-personal level) : personal level understanding always depends upon the activation of mental files in acts of speaker's reference (Recanati 2012, forthcoming a),²⁰ and a linking operation binding the files to roles in the frames evoked by lexical items of the predicative variety. This bridges the gap between utterances and thoughts. For thoughts themselves are best analysed as involving structured conceptual representations, over which the two levels of content we need for thoughts can be defined (Recanati forthcoming b).²¹

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²⁰ Mental files play the role of the 'demonstrations' in Kaplan's hybrid theory. What is semantically evaluated is not the expression but the expression associated with a mental file. In this framework, coreference *de jure* is the property of being associated with the same mental file (Recanati forthcoming c).

²¹ This chapter grew out of a talk given to the Metasemantics workshop that Seth Yalcin organized in Berkeley in March 2014. The talk was dedicated to Fillmore, who died shortly before the workshop. I am indebted to Seth, to Dilip Ninan with whom I shared a session, and to the participants for discussion. I am also indebted to the French Agence Nationale de la Recherche for logistic support under grant agreement n° ANR-10-LABX-0087 IEC and grant agreement n° ANR-10-IDEX-0001-02 PSL.

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